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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 415th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 2 October 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Trinidad and Tobago (CRC/C/11/Add.10; CRC/C/Q/TRI/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Sampson and Ms. Camps (Trinidad and Tobago) took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the delegation and invited it to introduce the initial report of Trinidad and Tobago (CRC/C/11/Add.10).

3. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the question of the rights of the child was of urgent concern to her country and the Government was committed to introducing measures to improve the status of children. It recognized the challenge facing it in carrying out the process of implementing the Convention in a coordinated fashion and in involving both the community and children themselves in that process.

4. The report covered essentially the period 1993 to 1995. The Government had ratified the Convention in November 1991 and it had entered into force in 1992. Following ratification, work had begun on a review of existing legislation and also on a National Plan of Action (NPA). Work on the report had been coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development, assisted by other social sector ministries and by non-governmental organizations. The involvement of NGOs had been ensured through a two-day workshop held in March 1995, at which a draft working document had been submitted for discussion. All substantive NGO contributions had been incorporated into the final version of the report.

5. The report highlighted the development of the National Plan of Action and the achievement of a number of World Summit goals, particularly in the fields of health and education. It dealt with maternal and child health, family planning, the environment, poverty alleviation and the situation of children in difficult circumstances. It gave an account of action taken to see how far existing legislation notably the Children Act, was in line with the Convention, as well as of initiatives to facilitate greater recognition of children's rights and to provide a higher degree of protection. For instance, a special committee had been set up to examine the situation of children in conflict with the law and had put forward a number of recommendations for new projects and programmes. The report also highlighted existing weaknesses in administrative machinery and noted the need for a single authority to take overall charge of children's affairs, as well as for a better system of data collection.

6. Since the report had been submitted, there had been further progress in implementing children's rights, particularly in the area of strengthening the family environment. For instance, UNICEF had helped launch a radio programme, "School for Parents", on which question and answer sessions were held involving not only parents and counsellors, but also young people. A programme for the training of parenting facilitators had been introduced, designed to provide opportunities for unemployed women. The number of staff

providing counselling services for families in distress had been increased, so that the service could be extended to regional areas. Further training was being provided for the staff of children's homes and there were plans for a halfway house for children leaving institutions where they could be taught the skills needed to reintegrate into the community. A new remand home and a probation hostel were also planned. In the area of health care, a number of prevention programmes had been introduced to help children with disabilities by targeting them at an earlier stage. Efforts were being made to familiarize the public with the rights of the child by distributing leaflets about the Convention to schools, NGOs and NPA coordinators. A special children's jamboree was planned for November, which would include a parade on the theme of the rights of the child.

7. The report made it clear that one problem needing urgent attention was the lack of an accurate statistical database on children's affairs which would facilitate quick responses. An inter-ministerial committee, together with UNICEF, was now reviewing proposals for such a database and was expected to complete its work shortly. A survey of child prostitution and child pornography had been carried out, as had a child situation analysis, and the resulting reports should be available by the end of the year. A special domestic violence unit had been set up and police officers were being given special training in how to recognize and deal with that problem. A new system of community policing had also been introduced.

8. At the time the report had been completed, there had been a change of government, and that meant that some time had been spent in familiarizing officials with plans and programmes already under way. A new committee had been set up to review the Children Act in the context of the Convention and it was due to report in a week's time. Basically, however, the priorities remained the same under the new Government. They included setting up a children's authority, establishing a Family Court, improving the foster care system and tightening up licensing standards for children's homes. Financing those measures might prove difficult and the country would continue to rely on the support of international organizations and of the international community, but the new Government was strongly committed to the Convention and had the necessary political will to implement it and she was confident that the necessary funding would be found.

9. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representative of Trinidad and Tobago for her very comprehensive introduction, which had answered a number of the Committee's questions in advance. She invited the members of the Committee to comment.

10. Mr. KOLOSOV said that, although he welcomed the evidence given of the Government's devotion to the cause of children, he still had some reservations about general measures of implementation. He was concerned that the structural adjustments made in the economy seemed to have had negative effects on children which had neither been foreseen nor prevented and included a deterioration in the role of the family and an increase in poverty in certain sectors of society leading to a greater incidence of child labour, child prostitution and child pornography. There seemed to be a need to update the National Plan of Action to take account of those developments.

11. He understood that there was as yet no centralized institution for the collection of data relating to children. He also had the general impression that society's attitude to children in Trinidad and Tobago was that they were second class citizens, without rights and responsibilities of their own.

12. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she was pleased to note that the report complied with the Committee's guidelines and was very frank and even self-critical in its approach. However, there was a tendency simply to state the problems without giving any indication of what action had been taken to deal with them. There seemed to be some discrepancy between the report and the written replies, perhaps owing to the change of government in the interim. For instance, she would like to know why, if the legislative review begun following ratification of the Convention had already produced a final document by 1994, there had been a need to begin another review in 1996. Was there any difference between the previous administration and the current one in terms of progress in implementing the Convention and were the priorities still the same? Who was the member of the Government in charge of implementation of the Convention and what steps had been taken to make members of parliament aware of its significance?

13. She noted that the committee in charge of implementation of the National Plan of Action was the same as the one in charge of the preparation of the report to the Committee. How was the necessary integration achieved in terms of planning and monitoring?

14. Mr. RABAH asked whether the Government planned to introduce a family law or a children's law relating specifically to children. By what means was coordination between the different ministries assured in formulating plans and policies for children and was specific provision made in the budget to ensure that the measures required to promote children's health, education and social development could actually be implemented in practice? How had the participation of NGOs in the preparation of the report been ensured?

15. Mrs. PALME said she had taken note of the economic difficulties which were faced by the Government and always had an impact on vulnerable groups. On the other hand, a UNICEF report giving figures for mortality rates for children under five years of age showed that the country had succeeded in maintaining good standards of child health care. Did the Government see the need for a new ministry for children's affairs, which would be responsible for collecting data and planning activities relating to children?

16. The CHAIRPERSON said that one of the innovative principles of the Convention had been the insistence throughout its provisions on participation by the child. She asked whether there had been any input from children when the report was being prepared. Paragraphs 17 to 20 of the report, which described the publicity given to the Convention, made no mention of efforts to make children themselves aware that they had rights even though sensitization of parents was envisaged (para. 20). Had any work been done to gauge children's attitudes to the novel concept of the rights of the child? In contacts on the subject with the public, what new attitudes entailed by the acceptance of children's rights were the hardest for the community to agree on? What was the status of the Convention and other international instruments in the context of Trinidad and Tobago law?

17. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that a number of measures had been taken to counter the adverse effects of structural adjustment. A Change Management Unit, now under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Development, had reviewed the situation and was currently considering practical measures for alleviation of poverty. A number of workshops had been held throughout the country to canvas the public's views on what should be done. Current measures included training programmes that would help the unemployed find work and thus be better able to support their families, as well as training programmes for unemployed young people. Existing safety net schemes whereby allowances were given to needy families were being continued.

18. In the context of poverty alleviation, efforts were being made to persuade the Government to earmark budget funds for issues related to children. Because the present budgetary system allocated funds by ministry, however, any such money would be divided up among the various ministries - health, education, social development, etc. - responsible for various aspects of children's welfare. The need was increasingly being felt for a single authority with responsibility for all children's issues to which all funds relating to children could be channelled.

19. A drop-in centre for street children had recently been opened as a joint venture by the Government and a non-governmental organization. Child labour in the informal sector was not currently a major problem. While it was true that traditional attitudes in the country had the effect of treating children as second class citizens, opinions were changing. Teacher training programmes and parenting programmes were helping to instil a different view of children and efforts were being made through the education system to make children aware of their rights.

20. The Committee set up to monitor the National Plan of Action (NPA) in 1995 had operated on a largely informal basis under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Development as an interministerial body reviewing the work of the various ministries involved in activities under the Plan. In 1997, the NPA Committee had been restructured on a more formal basis to include, in addition to representatives of the various ministries, representatives of other government bodies, parliament, non-governmental organizations and the public. She herself chaired the NPA Committee, but, because her other duties precluded giving all her attention to the Committee's work, an NPA Coordinator had been appointed who also served as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee. The Committee's terms of reference included monitoring the implementation of the Convention and its focal point continued to be the Ministry of Local Development, which was responsible for coordinating both the NPA itself and reporting on the implementation of the Convention.

21. The ratification of the Convention and other international instruments relating to children had made it necessary to amend existing legislation, such as the Children Act, the Adoption of Children Act and others. Since that process involved not only drafting the amendments, but Cabinet approval and passage through parliament, the procedure necessarily took time. The change of Government had further slowed that process.

22. There was considerable involvement of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Convention and the NPA. The NPA Coordinator was closely involved in working with such organizations. Non-governmental organizations had been involved in workshops on the Convention and, since the Ministry did not have sufficient staff to implement all measures related to the Convention, subsidies had been granted to such organizations to assist in the work. An example was the drop-in centre for street children already mentioned. A number of criteria had been developed to monitor the granting of subsidies. In addition, a process of consultation was currently under way to decide whether to continue the subsidy scheme or to contract such services out instead to enable non-governmental organizations to perform them on behalf of the State.

23. The international organization with which there had been most contact had been UNICEF, which had been extremely supportive in funding various activities. The International Court of Justice had also assisted in funding a workshop for non-governmental organizations. Cooperation with international organizations was seen as a vital and necessary means of helping to implement the Convention.

24. It was recognized that more effort was needed to involve children in the area of children's rights. Some schoolchildren had attended workshops; more efforts were also being made by ministries to consult children. The celebration of the Child Right Week also focused on involving children and efforts were being made to involve teachers more closely in the process.

25. Ms. CAMPS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the change of Government in 1995 had been the principal cause of the halt in amending legislation to bring it into line with the Convention. Although that change had made it necessary to review most legislation in the pipeline, the process was now complete and the Attorney-General was poised to reconvene the exercise, in which children's legislation would be given priority. However, some of the bills previously drafted would have to be abandoned and others modified because they no longer met the present conditions of the law-making process. Work on drafting new texts could not begin until instructions to that effect had been received from the Cabinet and, even when that had been received and bills prepared, the latter would then have to be subjected to passage through parliament before becoming law. The process was not a speedy one, but it could be assisted if the subject matter gained the sympathy of the general public, which could put pressure on their parliamentary representatives to hasten the legislative process. In the final analysis, however, whatever legislation was adopted, implementation would be conditioned by the funds available, which were adversely affected by structural adjustment.

26. Mrs. PALME asked whether any report on the present discussion would be made to children in Trinidad and Tobago and to other groups concerned with children's rights, such as parents, teachers, the police, the courts and others.

27. Mr. KOLOSOV, welcoming the fact that a centre for street children had been established, asked what proportion of children currently on the streets it could cater for. A single centre might mean that children attending it were separated from their home towns and family contacts.

28. Although child labour in the informal sector did not appear to be a major issue, that observation was often deceptive, since much of the problem was invisible. The informal sector always sought labour at the lowest cost, the cheapest form of labour being children. The problem was one that existed in every State and was particularly acute in difficult economic circumstances. He asked whether any effort had been made to investigate the situation on the ground.

29. He would like more information on the measures being taken to alleviate poverty. With regard to family allowances, he wondered whether they were sufficient to make up the shortfall in per capita income resulting from structural adjustment or whether they were more in the nature of a symbolic gesture, as happened in his own country.

30. He asked for more details of the subsidies granted to non-governmental organizations, particularly the amounts involved.

31. The CHAIRPERSON recalled that her question as to the possibility of making reference to the Convention in the courts had not yet been answered.

32. Referring to the written reply to question 10 of the list of issues, she asked what training was in view for the judiciary and the legal profession in relation to the implementation of the Convention. In her country, judges and lawyers tended to baulk at the idea of anyone trying to train them; she would therefore be interested to have more details on that point.

33. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that it was essential to create awareness among members of parliament of the importance of the issues dealt with in the draft legislation for the implementation of the Convention in order to ensure that timely action would be taken. Some areas of concern highlighted in the report included child-care facilities and domestic violence. She asked whether any progress had been made since 1995 with the corresponding legislative reforms or whether the new administration would more or less have to start its work from scratch. She also asked about the statement in paragraph 8 (b) of the report that the moral, religious or cultural bases of certain laws made it difficult to reach consensus. In that connection, how did the Government plan to elicit the views of the various groups concerned?

34. The CHAIRPERSON said she was aware of the existence of an ombudsman in Trinidad and Tobago, but wondered how easily children could address their complaints to him. The State party had failed to provide a satisfactory answer to the Committee's question about an ombudsman for children's rights. Perhaps, the national coordinator mentioned in connection with the National Plan of Action for Children might be able to assume such functions.

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

35. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said the delegation would take the opportunity afforded by its dialogue with the Committee to create awareness among the agencies concerned and the general public about the Committee's concerns and critical areas where follow-up action was required.

36. The problem of street children had not yet been quantified, although the results of the situation analysis of children in especially difficult circumstances, to be published by the end of the year, should provide a more accurate picture of the situation. For instance, it was important to draw a distinction between street children and working children, of whom there were many in Trinidad and Tobago. Special drop-in centres set up for street children provided care for an average of 25 children at any one time. One such centre was funded by the Government, while another was run by an NGO which had recently requested government subsidies. She would provide detailed figures of State subsidies to NGOs at a subsequent meeting. However, she noted that a substantial part of the national budget allocated to the Ministry of Social Development was used for NGO subsidies and that other government ministries also helped to fund NGO activities.

37. Child labour was not a significant problem in her country, probably because of the importance now attached to education by parents. Children in Trinidad and Tobago were not exploited as cheap labour in the manufacturing industry. They usually worked as street vendors or farm hands, often on a part-time basis, compatible with their school hours. A committee had recently been set up to consider the ratification of various ILO Conventions, starting with ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention, 1973).

38. She was unable to provide accurate figures on per capita income at present, but, it was worth noting that a recent UNDP human development report had commended Trinidad and Tobago on its efforts to alleviate poverty.

39. Referring to the statement made in paragraph 8 (b) of the report, she said that Trinidad and Tobago was a multicultural and multi-religious society with different traditions relating to the age of marriage, which were reflected in its common law. In recent years, education had served to cut across such traditions and the age of marriage was becoming higher, as most parents preferred their children to complete their education. In order to gauge public feeling on such issues, the Government had recently established a dialogue with the Inter-Religious Organization, in which all religious movements active in the country were represented.

40. With regard to corporal punishment, which was still applied in schools, the Ministry of Social Development was liaising with the Ministry of Education and had undertaken a number of initiatives at the community level to convey the message that corporal punishment was not in line with the principles of the Convention or modern child rearing practices. It was nonetheless difficult to change attitudes, particularly in the generation of parents aged between 60 and 70; government efforts alone would not suffice and greater involvement by civic and religious society was required.

41. There were currently no plans to establish an ombudsman for children's rights. Children could address their complaints or appear before the Ombudsman if they so wished. Perhaps as the dialogue on children's rights

with key actors and children themselves progressed and it became apparent that such a mechanism was necessary, the matter could be given further consideration.

42. Ms. CAMPS (Trinidad and Tobago), providing clarifications on the status of the Convention vis-à-vis domestic legislation, said that municipal law always took precedence over the Convention unless the instrument was incorporated in the municipal framework. That could be done in two ways: through an act of parliament, whereby the Convention was said to be law; and by amending existing legislation to reflect the provisions of the Convention. Present and past administrations had shown a preference for the latter method. However, the fact that the Convention did not supersede municipal laws was not to her knowledge a great source of conflict. Moreover, the Trinidad and Tobago courts had a tradition of taking the best interests of the child into account when dealing with cases involving children.

43. In reply to the question about the progress of legislative reforms introduced prior to 1995, she said that, although some of the work done by the previous Government would undoubtedly prove useful, given the subsequent reviews that had taken place, a considerable amount of redrafting would be required to reflect the position of the new administration.

44. With regard to training of the judiciary, it was worth noting that many lawyers who showed a particular interest in family and children's issues underwent a period of training with relevant NGOs or took part in workshops organized by the Ministry of Development. Although it was difficult to oblige members of the judiciary to join such programmes, some magistrates had volunteered for the training. There was thus a high level of acceptance, but at an unofficial level.

45. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to ask questions relating to definition of the child and general principles (paras. 12-18 of the list of issues).

46. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the current age of criminal responsibility was too low and inquired whether there were any plans to raise it. Also, how could the delegation claim that great store was set by a good education in Trinidad and Tobago when the age of compulsory schooling was 12? He requested clarification concerning the report that around 150,000 children under the age of 18 in Trinidad and Tobego did not attend school. He would also welcome further information on the legal age of marriage.

47. Mr. RABAH requested clarifications on the very low minimum age of employment (12) and the variations in the age of marriage allowed under common law. He also asked why there was a gender bias in the minimum age of sexual consent, but no minimum age for giving testimony before the courts.

48. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said she agreed that the age of compulsory education was too low and asked what happened to a child who was unable to go on to higher education. Perhaps the Government might consider harmonizing the minimum age of marriage at 16, in consultation with representatives from the different religious communities. Since the age of sexual consent for girls was 14, would a girl who got pregnant at a younger age be allowed to marry?

49. Mrs. PALME said that she associated herself with the remarks made by the other members of the Committee.

50. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the views of children had been sought on proposals under the National Plan of Action for Children to extend the protection afforded by the juvenile justice system to children aged 18. When young people in her own country had been consulted on that matter, they had been reluctant to agree to the change, preferring to come under the adult justice system as of the age of 16.

51. Ms. CAMPS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that, regrettably, legislation in Trinidad and Tobago did not always reflect current practice. Some time previously, the age of compulsory education had been established at 12, since children took a common entrance exam to accede to higher education between the ages of 11 and 12. However, children who did not pass that exam now had various options for continuing their education until the age of 15.

52. Laws relating to the minimum age of marriage had also been on the statute book for some 40 years, but by no means reflected current trends. It was no longer commonplace for Muslim girls to marry at 12; most now completed secondary education. The reform of such laws would nevertheless be a very difficult task for the Government, since they involved people's religious sensitivities and lengthy consultations with all parties concerned would be required in order to reach agreement.

53. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) confirmed that the legislation in force did not reflect current practice and that most children now remained in the education system until age 15. Trinidad and Tobago had developed an extensive system of junior and secondary schools. Those who chose not to move on to tertiary education generally completed their education in the former at age 15. Others who did not pass the common entrance exam were sent to post-primary centres. With the exception of drop-outs, that might go some way to explaining the apparently high number of children under 18 who did not attend school.

54. She had taken note of the comments made concerning the discrepancies between the age of marriage and sexual consent. Such matters would be subject to review, but, clearly, religious and moral considerations made any rapid change of the laws concerned unlikely. In discussions held in connection with the National Plan of Action for Children and workshops organized by the Ministry of Development, there had been general agreement that 16 would be acceptable as the minimum age for marriage, but more feedback was required from the parties concerned before the debate could be taken any further.

55. The Ministry of Labour recognized the need to regularize the anomalies in the legislation relating to the minimum age of employment, since employment of children aged 12 was permitted in some sectors, while the minimum age was 14 in others. Such matters would be discussed by the committee set up to consider the ratification, inter alia, of ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention, 1973).

56. The Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, which had been considering the age of criminal responsibility, had recommended that it should

be raised from 7 to 10 or 12. The country's laws were based on earlier English legislation which had since been changed, so that legal reforms were needed in Trinidad and Tobago as well. The matter of feedback from children required further investigation. Her delegation had taken note of the Committee's comments on laws defining age limits and agreed that most of them required amendment.

57. The CHAIRPERSON said that the age of marriage might be a sensitive issue, but she rejected the argument that it would be difficult to amend the law, seeing that the latter did not actually reflect current practice. She asked whether the dangers of early marriage and pregnancy to a girl's physical health and general development, including her education, had been evaluated. How soon were the sensitization programmes on raising the age of marriage to give stronger protection to the rights of the child likely to be introduced? At what age could girls and boys receive medical counselling without first having to obtain their parents' consent?

58. Mr. KOLOSOV asked whether illegal abortion was a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

59. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the dialogue on the age of marriage had to be continued. Studies on the subject had been carried out and the population therefore realized that early pregnancy could jeopardize a woman's reproductive health. The agreement of the religious authorities to any change also had to be sought. There was no limit to the age at which children could request sex counselling and she would supply more details on that question the next day. As abortion was illegal, few women would admit to having had one, so it was difficult to obtain reliable statistics. Great emphasis was therefore being placed on the accessibility of family planning services. The Ministry of Health's programme on "Choices" was targeted at teenage girls who had been pregnant and at teenage fathers. Because abortion was sometimes used as a means of contraception, attempts were under way to prompt changes in attitude through education.

60. The CHAIRPERSON, referring to question 15 of the list of issues, asked whether the equal opportunities bill mentioned by the delegation was also likely to be held up by the new administration's reorganization of the legal framework. What areas were included in the bill? Did it make specific reference to children?

61. Mr. KOLOSOV asked whether, in practice, there was any discrimination against children with disabilities and whether any countermeasures had been taken.

62. Ms. CAMPS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that rapid progress was being made on the equal opportunities bill, which had been introduced by the new Government. A joint select committee of parliament had been set up to examine the whole question of equal opportunities. The bill related to gender, age, race, religion and education and its provisions would definitely cover children, including those with physical disabilities. It had already been submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

63. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the need for a policy on adults and children with disabilities had been accepted both by the previous Government and by the current one. The policy covered, inter alia, education, health care and tax concessions. The financial implications of such a policy were still being costed, but some health and educational measures had already been adopted. There was no discrimination against the disabled. Leaflets and television documentaries had been prepared to heighten the general public's awareness of the fact that the disabled ought to lead a meaningful life and participate fully in the community. Her Government was carefully monitoring the implementation of ILO Convention No. 159 concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons).

64. Mr. RABAH requested examples showing that the views of the child had been respected in court decisions on alternative care, guardianship and custody.

65. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that discrimination in Trinidad and Tobago appeared to be based on racial origin and that the main victims were persons of African and Indian descent. She therefore wished to know whether any steps had been taken to safeguard children from the effects of such discrimination and what headway the Government had made with the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in that connection.

66. The CHAIRPERSON said that the delegation's reply to question 16 of the list of issues referred only to children born out of wedlock. Was that intentional or was the lack of information simply due to an absence of data, especially on children living in rural areas?

67. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that children who had been abused could be removed from their home by a social worker and placed in institutional care. There was a reluctance to separate a child from its family unless there were strong grounds for such action. The four largest children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago were run by church boards with government subsidies and a number of private homes had been founded to meet a perceived need for care. As a result of allegations that children in homes had been abused, a task force had been set up to look into standards of care in those institutions and a report would be submitted to the Cabinet in the very near future. There were also plans for a pilot foster-care system as a means of temporarily removing children from a hostile environment, but with a view to reuniting them with their families in due course, if that was warranted. Trinidad and Tobago also had a traditional culture of informally fostering the child of a relative or close friend. It was, however, recognized that all arrangements required extensive monitoring.

68. Equal opportunities were regarded as most important. That was why so much information had been given. All administrative authorities had tried to provide facilities to ensure that, even in rural areas, children had easy access to schooling and health services.

69. As far as minorities were concerned, the two main ethnic groups each accounted for 40 per cent of the population, with other small groups making up the total. There was no friction between them.

70. Ms. CAMPS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that racial discrimination was a highly sensitive question. In comparison with other countries, there was little ethnic strife in Trinidad and Tobago. The matter had perhaps been raised to prevent any further degeneration. She was personally of the opinion that the issue had been exaggerated. Trinidad and Tobago prided itself on being called a rainbow country because its society was ethnically extremely diverse. Many people were of mixed origin, and that in itself bore witness to a high degree of racial integration. Children did not experience any difficulties on that account and the few existing problems probably came with adulthood.

71. Mr. KOLOSOV pointed out that, if the two major groups made up 80 per cent of the population, that left 20 per cent divided among several other communities. What percentage of children from those groups were in higher education or in detention centres? Was it proportional to their share of the population? Was it true that children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago were overcrowded and that cases of abuse had occurred in them? He doubted that the fact that children played together was really proof that there was no discrimination in society.

72. Mrs. SARDENBERG stressed that non-discrimination was one of the general principles of the Convention. Covert discrimination was often common in multicultural societies. Was there any discrimination in respect of admission to private schools? She asked what mechanisms existed in schools to enable children to express their ideas and to ensure that those opinions were taken into consideration.

73. The CHAIRPERSON reminded the delegation that Mr. Rabah had asked for examples of the application of that principle in everyday life in the family and in court decisions.

74. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she was not completely satisfied with the answer to her question about discrimination. If the problem was encountered in adult life, that meant that there was discrimination and, in that case, care had to be taken to ensure that children were not influenced by the ideas of the adults around them. Children had to be taught tolerance.

75. Ms. SAMPSON (Trinidad and Tobago) said some groups considered that they suffered from discrimination, but society was trying hard to deal with the issue. Studies had been commissioned to investigate group representation in employment and education, but figures tended to vary with changes in administration and frequently reflected the concerns of the largest ethnic group in the Government in question. Other studies had shown that most of the people in detention centres and children's homes were of African and East Indian descent. It must nevertheless be remembered that the definitions of racial groups in her country were very broad. The smallest minorities which had long been the most affluent were under-represented in detention centres and children's homes. Once again, class, rather than race, influenced the representation of a particular group in private schools where education had to be paid for. In order to prevent children from being infected with racist ideas, parents had to be sensitized to the matter. When all was said

and done, statistics formed the only objective basis for solving such an emotive, thorny issue, particularly in view of the fact that some political parties had formed along ethnic lines.

76. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the old idea of children being seen, but not heard had been abandoned and whether children were allowed to speak their mind. Did mechanisms exist in schools and institutions to allow children to express their views? The answers to the outstanding questions would be taken up at the following meeting.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.